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(WASHINGTON, DC) -- Members of the United States House of Representatives today passed the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008.

**Included in the language of the legislation was a directive introduced by Congressman Russ Carnahan (MO-3rd) that requires the Surface Transportation Board to report back to Congress with study findings relating to the effectiveness and on time performance of Amtrak service compared to freight transportation service.**

The Congressman's aim in asking for the study relates to problems that exist due to passenger and freight trains using the same rails. In Missouri, between St. Louis and Kansas City, there often are undue delays. With additional people seeking to use trains as a primary transportation source, on time performance is very important. "I believe people who rely on the train back home understand the importance of on-time travel ", said Carnahan. "Rising fuel costs, coupled with out of reach air fares, make the train option, the only option for many during these tough times."

The much needed rail transit legislation:

- **Alleviates Rail “Choke Points.”** Many of Amtrak’s service routes outside the Northeast Corridor suffer from poor service reliability and on-time performance because of freight traffic congestion. This congestion prevents Amtrak from retaining and attracting new rider ship, and increases Amtrak’s operating costs. The Department of Transportation Inspector General recently reported that if Amtrak achieved an 85 percent on-time performance outside the Northeast Corridor in fiscal year 2006, it would have saved Amtrak \$136.6 million.
- **Increases Capital and Operating Grants to Amtrak.** These operating grants will also ensure that Amtrak can meet its obligations under

its recently negotiated labor contract.

- **Develops State Passenger Corridors.** In an effort to encourage the development of new and improved intercity passenger rail services, the bill creates a new State Capital Grant program for intercity passenger rail capital projects, and based on the New Starts transit capital program administered by the Federal Transit Administration.
- **Provides Funding for High-Speed Rail Corridors.** The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, established to develop a national transportation vision to address surface transportation needs for the next 50 years, recommends that the United States establish a high-speed rail network that spans the entire country.
- **Reduces Amtrak's Debt.** Federal support of Amtrak was cut drastically in fiscal year 2000 and 2001, forcing Amtrak to assume a large amount of debt to stay in operation. Amtrak has aggressively targeted this debt, paying down \$600 million from 2002 through 2007. Our bill helps Amtrak to take further steps to reduce its debt, authorizing \$1.7 billion (\$345 million per year) for debt service through FY2013. This funding will allow Amtrak to focus its resources on improving existing services and making additional capital and operational improvements.
- **Resolves Disputes between Commuter and Freight Railroads.** Currently, no Federal guidelines exist to mediate disputes between commuter rail providers and freight railroads over use of freight rail tracks or rights-of-way, nor is there a standard forum for negotiating commuter rail operating agreements. The bill establishes a forum at the STB to help complete stalled commuter rail negotiations, helping our rail network operate as efficiently as possible.